

FWP COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: December 20, 2012

Agenda Item: Spotted Dog WMA Grazing Lease Extension (Region 2, Powell County)

Division: Fish and Wildlife

Action Needed: Final Approval

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 10 minutes

Background

FWP proposes to extend the grazing lease with Rock Creek Cattle Company on FWP's 27,616-acre Spotted Dog Wildlife Management Area until Dec. 31, 2013. Under the July 28, 2010 purchase agreement, by which FWP purchased the WMA from RCCC, a grazing lease was established with RCCC that is set to expire on Dec. 31, 2012. At the time of purchase FWP was unaware that much of the property boundary was in need of repair or relocation and that grazing allotments on intermingled Helena National Forest lands on the eastern side of the WMA were resulting in significant trespass cattle grazing on the WMA.

The poor condition of boundary fences and complete lack of them adjoining the Forest allotments allow trespass cattle to graze on the WMA and prevent FWP from implementing the Management Plan and Decision Notice that the Commission adopted in August 2010. The proposed 1-year lease extension recognizes that a well fenced WMA boundary is a prerequisite for implementing rest from grazing. The purpose of this action—a one year extension of RCCC's right to graze 9,675 AUM for the standard WMA grazing rate—is to give FWP a year to implement actions (fencing and potential land exchanges) that would allow for more effective range management while continuing collecting income from grazing cattle. At the end of this one-year grazing extension, FWP intends to implement the management plan for the WMA, providing a period of grazing rest.

Public Involvement Process & Results

The Draft Environmental Assessment to extend cattle grazing by RCCC on Spotted Dog WMA was posted on FWP's website and mailed to interested public parties on Nov. 2, 2012. Formal public involvement under MEPA is ongoing. To date only six comments have been received with the majority of them in favor of the action. Public comment on this proposal will conclude on Dec. 3, 2012 with a Decision Notice issued soon there-after, which will be provided prior to commission action.

Alternatives and Analysis

No action would result in RCCC's lease expiring at the end of 2012; however, continued, uncontrolled cattle grazing would continue on the WMA and on the neighboring USFS Grazing Allotment, by other parties.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale

FWP recommends proceeding with a one-year extension of the RCCC grazing lease on Spotted Dog WMA.

Proposed Motion

I move the FWP Commission approve extending RCCC's grazing lease on Spotted Dog WMA to December 31, 2013.